

**Research and Development Classification Process Survey Results
For Session 6 Participants**

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The Research and Development Classification Process (RDCP) was established in July 2001 as the process by which the work and qualifications of high-grade scientists and engineers employed by NASA Langley Research Center are classified and any subsequent personnel actions are effected. The key characteristic of this process is application of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification guides and standards through a consensus decision-making process of peer scientists and engineers. A panel of such peers is convened to provide technical review of the assignment, impact, and qualifications that the employee brings to the position. RDCP panel chairs and members are non-supervisory Langley employees. The Office of Human Resources (OHR) effects the recommendations of the panels in terms of updating the employee's position classification and any resulting promotion. The selection of employees for review in each session initially was determined by random weighted assignment and some limited management requests for those already identified as ready for review or needing deferral. All of the approximately 800 employees initially assigned to a session will be reviewed between the summer of 2001 and the summer of 2004. Six sessions have been conducted to date (starting in August 2001), reviewing a total of 447 employees in about 56 branches across 49 panels involving a total of 327 employees as panel members. The process has resulted in 181 employees' jobs classified at their current grade, 223 classified at the next highest grade, one classified below grade, with the remainder to be reviewed again due to either insufficient information or appropriate Guide not applied. This paper describes the results of a survey conducted with participants of the sixth RDCP session and briefly compares it with results of an earlier survey of Sessions 1 through 5 participants. The purpose of the survey was to provide information about how well the process is working and where it may need improvement.

A simple survey (see copy in Appendix A) was posted on the internal LaRC web for three weeks (August 15 through September 5, 2003) in order to obtain feedback from RDCP participants in Session 6. Responses to the 18 items were anonymous and voluntary.

Session 6 Survey Results

Eighty-six out of the approximately 147 Session 6 participants responded to the survey, a 59% response rate: 14 out of 31 Branch Heads, 31 out of 54 panel members, and 41 out of 62 reviewees. Table 1 is a summary of the responses for all of the questionnaire items. (Items 5 through 16 were ratings from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 0 meaning no opinion or not applicable.)

Table 1. Summary of Responses to Questionnaire Items 1 through 17 for Session 5

Item No.	Item Name	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Session participated	86	na	5.0	na	na
2	Guide used	86	1.0	2.0	na	na
3	Hours spent	86	4.0	200	59.48	33.92
4	RDCP Role	86	1.0	3.0	na	na
5	Fair selection	86	1.0	5.0	2.88	1.57
6	Adequate training	86	1.0	5.0	3.56	1.17
7	Adequate handbook	86	1.0	5.0	3.63	1.00
8	Understandable process	86	1.0	5.0	3.76	0.93
9	Clear criteria	86	1.0	5.0	3.20	1.07
10	Conducted consistently	86	1.0	5.0	2.66	1.61
11	Improved classification process	86	1.0	5.0	2.90	1.68
12	Improved promotion process	86	1.0	5.0	3.34	1.50
13	Improved morale	86	1.0	5.0	2.79	1.33
14	Adequate time	86	1.0	5.0	3.91	1.36
15	Agree with panel	86	1.0	5.0	3.50	1.37
16	Report adequate	86	1.0	5.0	3.08	1.39
17	Reviewee decision category	39	1.0	4.0	na	na

The average number of hours spent on the RDCP was about 60 but with statistically significant differences among branch heads (21 hours), panel members (57 hours), and reviewees (75 hours), with standard deviations between 16 and 35 hours.

In general, the average rating scores were between 2.66 and 3.91. The average rating score of at least 3.0 (neither disagree nor agree) is used here as an arbitrary criteria for areas which are doing well. All but four items had average ratings greater than or equal to 3.0. These four items, Fair Selection (item 5), Conducted Consistently (item 10), Improved Classification System (item 11) and Improved Morale (item 13) had average ratings close to 3.0 (2.88, 2.66, 2.90, and 2.79 respectively).

For Fair Selection, the branch heads had higher scores (average rating of 3.0) but these scores were not statistically significantly different from those of the panel members and reviewees (2.77 and 2.90, respectively). For Conducted Consistently, both the branch heads and reviewees' average scores were lowest with 2.50 with panel members' average rating being 3.00. Again, this difference was not statistically significant among the roles of the participants. Branch heads rated Improved Classification System highest at 3.21 on average, 2.93 was the average rating by reviewees, and 2.71 for panel members. However, these differences were not statistically significant. For Improved Morale, there

was also no significant difference among the roles although the panel members had the lowest average rating of 2.65 but the reviewees' average rating was 2.90, and Branch heads' average rating was 2.79.

The only significant difference in any items by role of participant was for item 14 (Allowed Adequate Time). For item 14, the branch heads did not agree (average rating of 2.36) that they had adequate time to work on the RDCP although the panel members and reviewees did agree (4.1 and 4.2, respectively). At least one comment indicated the lack of time was due to other work commitments, although personal communications received also indicated little time allowed by the reviewees for their branch heads to edit the final packages before they were due.

The fact that 65 percent of all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the panel results is a very good indicator that RDCP is a process that provides valid results. In fact, 57 percent of the branch heads agreed or strongly agreed with the panel results as did 67.7 percent of panel members and 56.8 of the reviewees.) Of the reviewees, 20 of the 38 respondents had been evaluated as above grade. These reviewees gave an average rating of 4.45 for Agree with Panel Decision (item 15), indicating strong agreement with the panel results. However, the 18 respondents who had been evaluated at grade had an average rating of 2.50, which indicated they disagreed with the panel results; only 33 percent of them agreed or strongly agreed with the panel decision. The differences in ratings among roles for item 15 were not statistically significant although the differences among the reviewees by decision category were significant.

When Improved Morale (item 13) average ratings within reviewees were compared with the actual panel decision results, there was a significant difference by panel decision category. Not surprisingly, those reviewees who received promotions gave an average rating of 3.7 to the question about improved morale, whereas those who remained in their current grade gave an average rating of 2.06 for this item.

Table 2. Practically Significant Correlation Coefficients ($r \geq .45$, $p = .00$) for Session 5 participants

Item	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
Q3	1	.54	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q4		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q5			1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q6				1	.55	.55	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q7					1	.59	.56	-	-			-	-	
Q8						1	.64	.48	-	.46		-	-	-
Q9							1	.55	.49	.48	.49	-	-	-
Q10								1	.59	.47	.57	-	.47	-
Q11									1	.48	.55	-	-	-
Q12										1	.65	-	-	-
Q13											1	-	.56	.56
Q14												1	-	-
Q15													1	.66

Responses were examined also in terms of correlations among items. A statistically significant correlation coefficient equal to or greater than $r = .45$ was considered to be of practical or meaningful significance. From Table 2, above, items 6 (Training), 7 (Handbook), and 8 (RDCP Understandable Process) are correlated, which is to be expected as they are all related to training and understanding the process. Items 9 (Clear Criteria) and Item 13 (Improved Morale) each correlated with six items, more than any other items. And, some of these items were correlated with each other. Conducted Consistently, item 9, was related to Agree with Panel Decision, item 15. Improved Morale was related to clear criteria, conducted consistently, improved classification and promotion processes, agree with panel decision, and adequate panel report (items 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, and 16 respectively). A further analysis indicated that improved morale ratings were affected mostly by the responses to item 12, RDCP is an improved promotion process. (Forty-two percent of the variance in the ratings for Improved Morale was explained by item 12 responses in a regression analysis.) Finally, the adequacy of the panel report (item 16) was also correlated with agreeing with the panel decision (item 15).

Summary of Comments

A summary of comments made by the respondents is in Appendix B. In general the comments dealt with comparison of the RDCP to perceptions of the old promotion process, role of management, concerns about the time involved, and concerns about consistency. Both positive and negative comments were received. All comments were read and studied. Some suggestions were passed on to the Advisory Committee for consideration. (The Advisory Committee did receive all the unedited comments for their own reading.) However, some comments are indicative that more training and information are needed to clear up some misperceptions about RDCP.

Two issues or misperceptions appear in these comments and are now being addressed in training for subsequent sessions. That is, there are misperceptions that RDCP is a performance review and that it should provide information on what to do to improve performance and/or increase chances of promotion. RDCP applies criteria from OPM Evaluation Guides about the nature of the person's position and their stature and contributions. While performance may be related, RDCP reviews are not assessing all the elements of performance. If someone is performing well, he or she is likely to be very productive and have more stature and significant contributions, and thus get a higher score and a promotion. However, someone could be performing very well, but not on the type or scope of projects or studies which warrant a higher score. He or she may not be making significant enough contributions to the field even though he or she is a very good, reliable worker. Likewise, the panel evaluations concentrate on what the person is doing now and determine the appropriate score for that. The evaluations do not take on the additional task of assessing why the person is not necessarily at a higher grade level than the one determined. That is left to the reviewee's manager and reviewee to analyze against the criteria in the Guides for the higher grade levels and to plan duties and projects that may help the reviewee to satisfy those criteria. However, a panel will

usually try to explain how someone fell short of a defined degree level, such as when a Degree D is given instead of a Degree E. The inference can then be made that if this deficiency were satisfied, chances for a higher degree level being assigned at the next review would be greater.

As a result of Session 6 feedback, some changes were made for Session 7. The main changes were more examples of reviewee write-ups and panel evaluations, including degree definitions, and release of a mock panel evaluation video to give people a better idea of what goes on during a panel session.

Comparison of Session 6 Survey Responses with Previous Sessions

Overall, there was little change or some improvement in RDCP ratings from Session 5. For all but five items, ratings increased from Session 1 to 5. While ratings decreased slightly for five items from Session 5 to Session 6, these changes were not statistically significant. (Results of Session 5 and earlier surveys can be found at <http://ohr.larc.nasa.gov/RDCP.html>.)

There were statistically significant differences across one or more sessions for eight items. The average mean rating for these items for each session are shown in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 1. The bolded ratings are the sessions that most differed statistically significantly from each other. (Pair wise comparisons also indicated differences among some other sessions for some items.)

The highest ratings over all the sessions were for items 14 and 15, which means that most respondents were allowed adequate time and agreed with the panel decision. The next highest rating was for item 8, RDCP is an understandable process. Item 7 tends to have increases in ratings across the sessions that indicate improvement in the RDCP Handbook (later the Guidance Document) from session to session. Ratings for items 5, 10, 11, and 13 are still marginally low. Some increases in ratings for these items indicate that the process is conducted more consistently, is an improvement over the old classification process, and has increased morale. However, there is room for improvement in all of these items so that they will continue to be addressed. Especially, plans to conduct the process even more consistently, and to improve panel evaluation reports (items 10 and 16, respectively) will be made as the ratings for these items decreased over the last two sessions. Even so, these decreased ratings were higher than the ratings in the first two sessions.

ITEM	Session						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Time spent, Q3	59.22	57.58	56.57	54.33	60.75	59.48	58.24
Fair selection, Q5	2.86	2.80	2.61	2.98	2.73	2.88	2.80
Training, Q6*	3.12	3.08	3.35	3.55	3.52	3.56	3.33
Handbook, Q7*	2.97	3.24	3.39	3.48	3.48	3.63	3.34
Understandable, Q8	3.27	3.43	3.55	3.67	3.53	3.76	3.51
Criteria, Q9*	2.56	2.96	2.93	3.18	3.03	3.20	2.95
Consistent, Q10*	2.43	2.66	2.65	3.27	2.95	2.66	2.73
Classification, Q11*	2.28	2.84	2.66	2.93	3.05	2.90	2.76
Promotion, Q12*	2.68	2.92	2.95	3.42	3.33	3.34	3.07
Morale, Q13	2.34	2.61	2.66	2.98	2.90	2.79	2.69
Time allowed, Q14	3.50	3.68	3.92	3.83	3.85	3.91	3.77
Agreed, Q15	3.46	3.80	3.43	3.77	3.87	3.50	3.64
Report, Q16*	2.35	2.79	3.10	3.58	3.49	3.08	3.01

*Differences among sessions are significant.

Table 3. Average Responses to Survey Items for Sessions 1 through 6

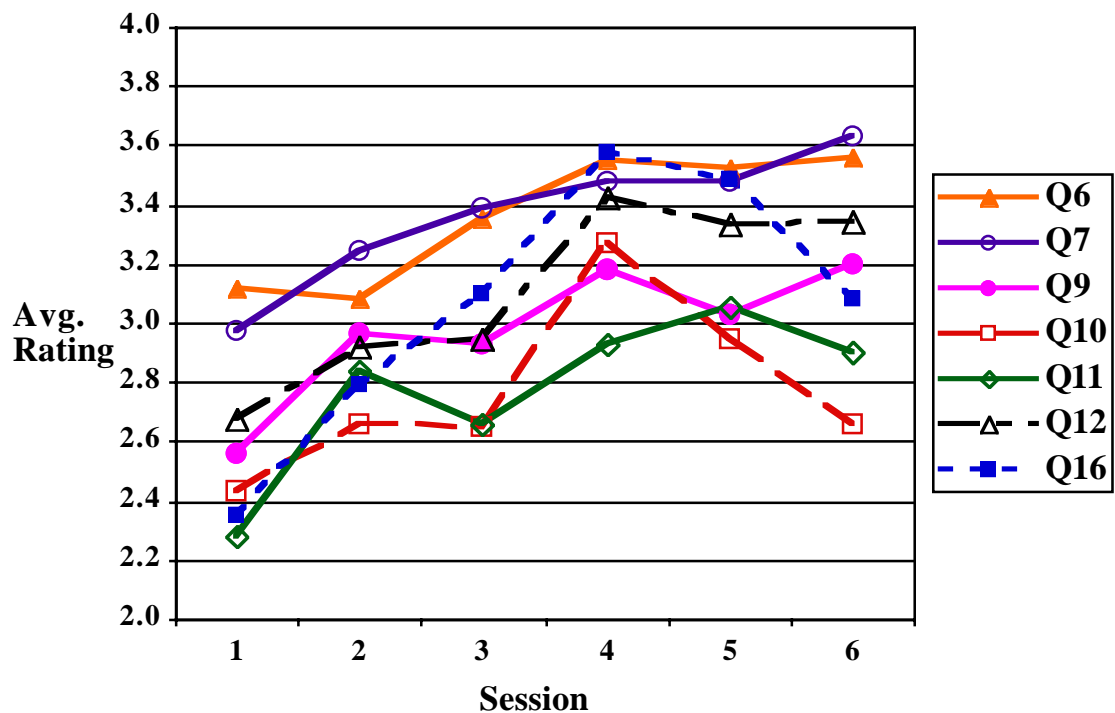


Figure 1. Significant differences in average ratings among sessions.

The average ratings for a few items have remained essentially the same across the sessions and did not differ statistically significantly. These are illustrated in Figure 2.

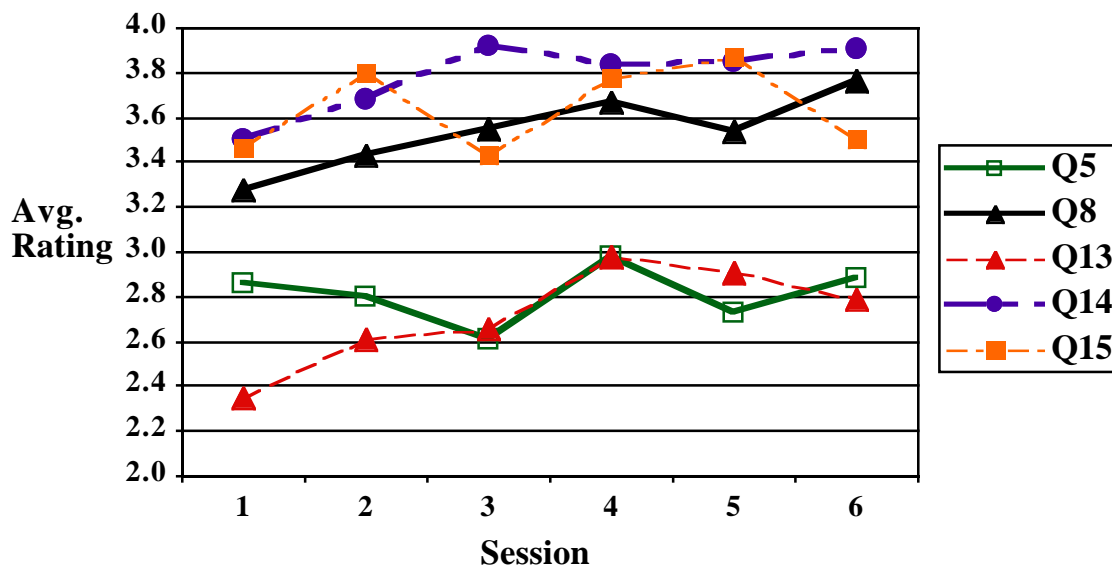


Figure 2. Average ratings across sessions that did not differ significantly.

That is, the ratings remained relatively low for Fair Selection (item 5) reflecting some comments received that the random selection process is not seen as fair or that some people do not understand the selection process. This started being addressed in training starting in Session 6 and may have had some positive effect as the rating for Session 6 was slightly higher than for Session 5. Likewise, the ratings for Improved Morale (item 13) has stayed low although the ratings are higher for the last three sessions than those for the first three sessions. On the other hand, for items 8, 14, and 15 respondents consistently rate these relatively high indicating that the RDCP is an understandable process, adequate time was allowed for it, and that panel decisions are agreed with.

Conclusions

The RDCP is a peer review process to determine the appropriate grade level for person-in-the-job positions. Six sessions have been conducted to date (starting in August 2001), reviewing a total of 447 employees in about 56 branches over 49 panels involving a total of 327 employees as panel members. The process has resulted in 181 employees' jobs classified at their current grade, 223 classified at the next highest grade, one classified below grade, with the remainder to be reviewed again due to either insufficient information or appropriate Guide not applied. This paper described the results of a survey conducted with participants of the sixth RDCP session and compared it with results of previous surveys. The survey responses indicate increasingly greater understanding and satisfaction among RDCP participants. However, future changes will address improved training in describing the purpose of the evaluations (they are not performance reviews or necessarily result in suggestions to get promoted next time). Efforts will continue to

ensure as much consistency as possible among the peer groups and across the RDCP sessions.

APPENDIX A

Research and Classification Process Questionnaire

In order to improve the Research and Development Classification Process, feedback from all the participants is critical, whether you are a reviewee, a panel member, or a Branch Head. The survey below was designed to gather that feedback yet be quick and easy to do. While your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, your response would help form a more accurate picture of how the RDCP is progressing. Your responses are completely anonymous. The data will be analyzed and presented as representative of the entire sample, such as ranges, averages, variances, and percentages. This survey will close November 29 at 5:00pm. The results, but not the data, of the survey will be made available to all RDCP participants and will be posted on the RDCP website: <http://ohr.larc.nasa.gov/RDCP.html>. This survey, or one similar to it, will be repeated for each Session. Please respond to all items by clicking on the appropriate answer or by typing in the information requested. If you have participated in the RDCP in more than one role, such as a reviewee one session and a panel member another session, please fill out the survey twice, once for each role. Thank you for your help in improving the RDCP!

Section I

1. In which Session did you participate in the RDCP?
Session 1
Session 2
2. Please indicate which Guide you used for the RDCP.
Research Grade Evaluation Guide
Equipment Development Grade Evaluation Guide
Other
3. Please estimate the amount of time, in hours, you spent working on the RDCP.
4. Please indicate your participant role.
Branch Head/Supervisor
Panel Member
Reviewee

Section II

Scale (0=No Opinion or Don't Know, 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree):

5. The method used to select the Session for a person's review is fair to most RDCP AST researchers and developers :
6. Your RDCP training was adequate :
7. The RDCP Handbook was adequate :
8. The RDCP process is understandable :

9. The RDCP process provides clear criteria for classification of job duties :
10. The RDCP process is conducted consistently for most researchers, to your knowledge
11. The RDCP process is an improvement over the old classification process
12. The RDCP process is an improvement over the old promotion process :
13. Your morale has improved due to implementation of the RDCP process :
14. You were allowed adequate time to work on the RDCP :
15. You agree with the panel's decision(s) (regardless of role):
16. The panel evaluation report was adequate to explain the scores received:

17. If you were a reviewee, please indicate the panel's decision.
 - Above Grade
 - At Grade
 - Below Grade
 - Other

18. Please provide any general comments or explanations of above responses here.

APPENDIX B

Summary of RDCP Survey Comments from Session 6 RDCP Participants

Nine pages of text comments were received as part of the 86 survey responses. Many respondents made one or more comments. The comments seemed to cover both ends of the same spectra, that is, for every point someone made a negative comment about, at least one or more positive comment was made, and vice versa. Some of the comments are general dissatisfaction with having a RDCP type process versus a different system. However, several comments were about the RDCP itself. Most of the comments were of the same general categories as those from the earlier sessions.

Below is a listing representative of all the comments received. (The RDCP Advisory Committee received a copy of the complete, unedited comments.) Similar comments were received regardless of role of participant. Some of these concerns have already been addressed as of this writing, but plans are being made to address as many more as possible.

General –

- The process is relatively transparent and all get to compete.
- Was a good experience and time well spent.
- If we had had the budget to promote, the people promoted by RDCP would have been promoted by their supervisors in the old system.
- RDCP recognizes contributions of the researcher as judged by other researchers using a standardized process – much superior to old process that was strictly based on management input.
- Brought records up to date, exposing lack of supervisor record management and performance reports.
- Has clarified dual ladder career path.
- People are avoiding working on large teams because afraid can't get credit.

Managerial Responsibility-

- Wasn't allowed a deferral by supervisor although requested it and it seemed to fit approved reason for deferral.
- Have branch heads serve as panel members
- The evaluation should be the supervisor's job.

Time –

- RDCP adds stress and reduces productivity during the preparation time.
- Had to work on write-ups at home because of other work commitments – no one else available to do the work.
- Allowed adequate time to prepare.

Consistency and Quality–

- Criteria are not easily matched in all respects to an engineering or scientific position.
- Panel members spent a great deal of time and care on the reviews.

- There are too many gray areas in the criteria.
- Process has been managed with the highest fairness and professionalism.
- Criteria interpretation is very subjective.
- Panel personalities appear to have great impact on outcomes.
- Panel reports should provide more explanation and details.
- Recent experience and assignments should not outweigh older accomplishments.

Training-

- Too much material to review and understand in order to do write-ups.
- Provide more definitions for words in the criteria, such as “important” and “significant.”
- Training presentation more helpful than the Handbook.
- Training should be either step-by-step description or an overview, but not both.
- Need a better way to notify people about changes from previous sessions.

Process –

- Get more wild cards to allow more early reviews.
- Allow future reviewees to observe panels.
- Let supervisors initiate when employees are reviewed rather than have regular reviews.
- The wait between completing the package and getting the results was too long.
- Conduct the sessions more frequently, too spread out now.
- Current grade and the last time a grade increase was obtained should be available to panels.

(Note: Existing grade levels are not discussed, whether or not known, because it is not relevant to establishing correct grade level for current work based on the Guide criteria.)